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ABSTRACT

Warren County (North Carolina) High School is in its fourth year of a plan that divides the 180-day school year into three 60-day trimesters. Each day contains four class periods, and each trimester-long course earns students one-half credit. All students and teachers are rescheduled at the beginning of each trimester. The plan's many advantages include more efficient use of time, encouragement of faculty coordination, improved scope for broadening the curriculum, decreased demands on resources, greater flexibility in scheduling and making changes, and increased time during the day for the development of effective relationships between students and teachers. Disadvantages include the breakup into two or more parts of courses traditionally seen as whole units, class periods that may be overlong for some subjects, decreases in the number of days available for development of relationships between students and teachers, difficulties in scheduling for transfer students, and the need to undertake the scheduling process three times a year rather than twice. Under the plan, students graduating have shown an increase in the number of units earned. The plan also enabled many students who failed the first trimester of a standard two-trimester course to retake the first trimester and still complete the course for full credit by the end of the year, a recovery rate impossible under semester organization. (PGD)

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THE TRIMESTER SCHEDULING PLAN
FLEXIBILITY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION

In the winter and spring of 1981, a trimester scheduling plan was developed for Warren County High School. The school, a new consolidated high school, was scheduled to open in the fall of 1981 and serve approximately 1,000 students in grades 9 - 12. The plan was developed and approved by the Board of Education in an effort to make the high school curriculum more flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of high school students.

Warren County High School is now in its fourth year of operation under this plan. The plan has undergone numerous revisions since the initial plan was developed a little over three years ago, but the basic pattern has remained intact. This presentation will describe the trimester scheduling plan, describe some advantages and disadvantages which have been experienced, and present some statistical data which indicate advantages to the student population in particular.

THE ANNUAL SCHEDULE

The 180 day school year is divided into three 60-day trimesters. For example, the trimester dates for 1984-85 are:

Fall (1st) Trimester	Winter (2nd) Trimester	Spring (3rd) Trimester
September 4 - November 29	December 4 - March 6	March 11 - June 10
60 student days	60 student days	60 student days

Two teacher workdays are scheduled between trimesters to allow for preparation of grade reports, parent conferences, and re-scheduling for the next trimester. This fits well with the systemwide K - 8 schedule which calls for report cards each 6 weeks with parent conferences each 12 weeks. Parents of high school students receive a mid-term grade report at the mid-point of the trimester and a final grade report at the end of the trimester.

THE DAILY SCHEDULE

Each day consists of four class periods along with the usual time set aside for homeroom, break and lunch. Each class period averages 78 minutes in length. In the course of one trimester, the student spends 78 hours in a class and receives 1/2 unit of credit for the course. On the trimester system, all courses carry 1/2 unit of credit with the exception of certain vocational courses where a course meeting 2 periods per day carries one unit of credit. The daily schedule in 1984-85 is:

Mon., Tues., Wed., Fri.			Thursday		
8:25	- 8:35	Advisory Period	8:25	- 9:05	Advisory Period
8:40	- 10:00	1st Period	8:30	- 9:05	Activity Period
10:00	- 10:10	Break	9:08	- 10:18	1st Period
10:15	- 11:35	2nd Period	10:18	- 10:25	Break
11:40	- 1:35	3rd Period and Lunch (35 min.)	10:30	- 11:40	2nd Period
			11:45	- 1:40	3rd Period and Lunch (35 min.)
1:40	- 3:00	4th Period	1:45	- 3:00	4th Period

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THE STUDENT SCHEDULE

Every student takes four classes per day each trimester. In the course of a year, a student will earn 6 units of credit toward graduation if all courses are passed. (4 courses per trimester x 1/2 unit per course x 3 trimesters = 6 units). At the beginning of the year, a student's schedule may be:

1st Trimester	2nd Trimester	3rd Trimester
1. English 12	1. English 12	1. Speech
2. Adv. Math	2. Astronomy	2. Comp. Prog.
3. Chorus	3. Comp. Prog.	3. French III
4. French III	4. Adv. Math	4. Chorus

At the beginning of the second and third trimesters, all students and teachers are re-scheduled. If this particular student, for example, fails Advanced Math in the first trimester, then in the second trimester, he has the option of taking the course again (and taking the last half of the course in the third trimester) or dropping the course and picking up another course.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The Trimester Plan is not intended to be a remedy for all educational problems, however, it does provide a program which is more easily adapted to the needs of individual students and more flexible in the way teachers choose to utilize student time in class. Some specific advantages and disadvantages of the Trimester Plan include:

Advantages of the Trimester Plan

1. It provides class time (80 minutes) sufficient for classes to become student-centered rather than teacher-centered. More of the elements of effective teaching can be incorporated into the class period - introduction, review, direct instruction, guided practice, evaluation, and assignment.
2. Reduces wasted time for students. For example, by simply eliminating two class changes per day, 30 hours of instructional time (the equivalent of 6 days) has been added to the school year. The time spent getting a class started and wrapping up a class session has been reduced by 33% since a 1/2 unit course meets 60 times rather than 90. No study halls are utilized.
3. Requires more faculty team effort in planning the curriculum and instruction since the student may have more than one teacher for the two halves of a one-unit course. Also, more effort is required in planning curriculum and instruction because of the inclusion of a high percentage of 1/2 unit courses in the curriculum.
4. Reduces the number of daily teacher lesson preparations (maximum of four).
5. Reduces the number of daily student lesson preparations (maximum of four).
6. Reduces the total number of students a teacher will have in his/her classes at a given point in the school year.

7. Broadens the curriculum by allowing the convenient inclusion of 1/2 unit courses. Presently, we offer 124 different courses of which 41% are 1/2 unit courses, 47% are 1-unit courses and 12% are 1-1/2 unit courses.

8. Allows students who experience difficulty in a course to start the course over after failing only 1/2 unit of work. Also, allows students to stop taking a course and switch to another course after failing, or barely passing only 1/2 unit of work.

9. Provides an opportunity every twelve weeks to change teachers (from the student's point of view) and change students (from the teacher's point of view) when teacher-student conflict arises.

10. Decreases the demand for textbooks and other course-related resources. This results from the total number of students enrolled in a given course at a given time being 67% of the number which would be enrolled in a six period day.

11. Lessens the frequency and degree to which teachers are called upon to teach courses outside their area of certification.

12. Provides a compromise to the dilimma of smaller class size and no planning period versus larger class and one planning period. We give all academic subject teachers the equivalent of one half a planning period (one free period during one trimester per year). Our class sizes average about 25 and we employ only 2 locally paid positions at the high school.

13. Permits students with health or other problems to be absent from school for a three month period and still earn up to four units of credit during the year.

14. Provides three points during the school year at which students in their fifth year or more in high school can either graduate or return to school to renew their high school education.

15. Collectively, these factors place us in a position of being able to demand more of students and, at the same time, make it possible for all students to accomplish more during their high school program.

Disadvantages of the Trimester Plan

1. Causes a break in sequence in some courses which have been traditionally viewed as one unit courses, i.e., Algebra I, American History, etc. A student may take the first part of American History the first trimester and the second part of American History the third trimester.

2. Does not allow the length of time (36 weeks) previously allowed for the development of teacher-student relationships.

3. The eighty minutes class period may be longer than desired for some subjects, choral music for example.

4. Causes some difficulty in developing schedules for transfer students both to and from our high school. In 1983-84, 16 students transferred to W.C.H.S. during the year and 19 students transferred from W.C.H.S.

5. The scheduling process has to be undertaken three times annually.

THE MECHANICS OF SCHEDULING

Scheduling was considered one of the major disadvantages of the trimester, since students had to be scheduled three times a school term. However, this is no longer so. With the use of a program named The Classifier, we are able to schedule the students in a three-day period. The majority of the work done on schedules is done during the summer. The principal or administrator decides during the summer from pre-registration forms what courses the student will take each trimester. These requests are input into the computer and the program does the scheduling. This program can be purchased from Mount Castor Industries, 368 Shay Street, Amherst, Massachusetts 01002. This program is designed for the TRS-80 Model III 48K or 64K and has been adapted for use on certain Apple computers.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

1. Over the past two years, students graduating from Warren County Schools have shown a marked increase in the number of units earned toward graduation.

   1981 - seniors graduated with an average of 19.30 units
   1982 - seniors graduated with an average of 19.59 units
   1983 - seniors graduated with an average of 20.22 units
   1984 - seniors graduated with an average of 20.54 units

2. Over the past three years, the percentage of graduates with 20 units credit or more has increased by 23%. In 1981, 42% of our seniors graduated with 20 units or more. In 1982, the figure was 43%. In 1983, the figure was 57%. In 1984, the figure had risen to 65%. The 20-unit factor is significant in that in 1987, the statewide minimum requirement for graduation will rise from 18 to 20 units.

3. Over the past three years, the percentage of high school students dropping out during the school year has remained low. During this period of time, an average of 4.7%.

4. Course failure is a constant problem to and with high school students. Trimester scheduling provides a way to deal with the problem during the year. For the 1982-83 school year, the schedules and grades of 1,008 students were reviewed. This review revealed that 63% of the students failed at least one 1/2 unit course during the year.

   Of the 1,961 course failures, 1,213 of them occurred during either the first or second trimester. This provided 1,213 opportunities for a student to re-take a course during the next trimester. In 34% of these cases (411 instances) the student took the course again and passed the course. In the other 802 instances, the student either took the course again and failed again or switched to another course of study.

   Students who failed 2.5 or fewer units during the year made up 82% of students failing courses. Of this group, a significant 47% took the course again and passed the course during the year. Without the flexibility of the trimester scheduling, this type of "recovery rate" would not be possible.

For further information concerning the trimester scheduling plan, call or write:

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